

# “Four Women,” Three Songs: Nina Simone’s Voice (as Sound Object) in Global Hip-Hop Sampling

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## Abstract

This article explores the transformative power of hip-hop sampling in reshaping the legacy and cultural resonance of American vocalist, pianist, and composer Nina Simone. Simone's voice, known for its potency in protest songs, continues to find new life in contemporary hip-hop and popular music. Through an examination of two hip-hop songs, Jay-Z's "The Story of O.J." and Polish rapper/DJ duo Fisz and Emade's "Heavi Metal," this article delves into the complex process of cultural reterritorialization, wherein Simone's voice is repurposed to convey new meanings and contexts within and beyond her original cultural identity. These case studies, set against the backdrop of American and European hip-hop, shed light on the global reach of Simone's voice as it functions as a cultural authenticator for Jay-Z and a nostalgic element for Fisz, often diverging from the original Black feminist message. The examination also extends to the visual realm by exploring how the music videos accompanying Jay-Z and Fisz's works contribute to the reception and interpretation of the sampled materials. Ultimately, this essay underscores the dynamic nature of cultural phenomena, highlighting how Simone's voice continues to evolve, resonate, and inspire across generations and geographies, transcending its original context to tell new stories.

## Keywords

Sampling— Hip-Hop — Black feminism — Nina Simone

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## Introduction

In January 2023, *Rolling Stone* Magazine released its list of the “200 Greatest Singers of All Time.” American vocalist, pianist, and composer Nina Simone was chosen as #21, described for the potency of her protest songs and métier of vocal delivery: “the euphoria pulsing through her voice spoke for itself.”<sup>1</sup> Simone was an activist, poet, songwriter, bandleader, feminist, and scholar who has long been praised for her role as a key figure in sonically charging the civil rights movement with her protest and freedom songs.<sup>2</sup> While her

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<sup>1</sup> Rolling Stone, “The 200 Greatest Singers of All Time,” *Rolling Stone.com*, January 1, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> For more about Simone’s musical impact during the Civil Rights movement, see Tammy L. Kernodle, “‘I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free’: Nina Simone and the Redefining of the Freedom Song of the 1960s,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 2, no. 3 (2008): 295-317, doi.org/10.1017/S1752196308080097.

indelible mark on the musical (and sociocultural) landscape of African American creative output is undeniable, a newer generation of listeners may perhaps first encounter Simone's voice as sampled audio in an R&B or hip-hop song rather than in her original work, capturing the grain of her voice without the potency of her visible presence.<sup>3</sup> According to Barthes, this grain is of the body and not universally understood. Here, grain represents the presence of Simone embodied in the singing voice, allowing her sound to carry ideas of her "self" as a sound object for other generations to acknowledge.

Sampling is a prominent practice in the production of hip-hop and popular music, utilizing existing sonic materials from previous recordings. In this article, I consider how the imaginative repurposing of Simone's voice in two hip hop songs creates new contexts of understanding that demonstrate the potential for sampled voices (and the individuals they represent) to be given new lives and meanings within and outside of their lived cultural identity. Further, I will focus on her 1966 song "Four Women" and its sampled use in African American rapper Jay-Z's 2001 song "The Story of O.J." and Polish rapper/DJ duo Fisz and Emade's 2008 song "Heavi Metal," analyzing their use of her work while considering the following questions: What is gained in each context from the clear use of her vocal styling and musical material? What is celebrated or occluded about her identity and the song's original meaning in sampling her voice within the context of each song? How are the artists' ambitions relative to Simone's sampled materials communicated to the listener?

I use these songs as case studies because of their geographical and cultural distance and difference, adding to discourse on musical borrowing by considering American and European hip hop sampling of a single artist. I explore the use of Simone's work through a Black feminist lens while situating the global use of her voice as an act of "cultural reterritorialization," a concept created by James Lull to describe the "process of active cultural selection and synthesis drawing from the familiar and the new."<sup>4</sup> In doing so, I demonstrate the mobility of cultural phenomena transcending original functions, with Simone's sampled voice functioning as cultural authenticator for Jay-Z and nostalgic longing for Fisz without signaling the song's original Black feminist message. I additionally explore the music video for the work of Jay-Z and Fisz to understand how the musical messages, including Simone's voice, permeate the visual and to what effect.

### *Simone as Authenticator in Modern Hip-Hop Recording*

Nina Simone, born Eunice Kathleen Waymon in 1933, grew up in Tryon, North Carolina in a religious home filled with music. Her mother, a Methodist preacher, played the piano as many members of her family did, but Simone excelled. She flourished as a local celebrity throughout her youth, nurtured by her piano teacher who taught her classical music. Simultaneously, she enjoyed the Black religious and popular music styles of her era at home and at her mother's church.<sup>5</sup> These musical roots shaped her experimental musical style, which often juxtaposed seemingly opposing genres, like soul and showtunes as in her protest song, "Mississippi Goddam," first released in 1964. Simone was powerful and proficient on the piano, and longed to become a celebrated African American pianist. She left home for Atlantic City, New Jersey, where her unapologetically expressive, unapologetically woman, and unapologetically Black performance style gained

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<sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> James Lull, *Media, Communication, Culture: A Global Approach* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 161.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Anthony Neal, "Simone, Nina," *Grove Music Online*, January 31, 2014.

her notoriety.<sup>6</sup> Her idiosyncratic stage presence was bursting with spontaneity from dance breaks and pianistic improvisation.

Nina Simone's "Four Women" was released on her 1966 studio album *Wild is the Wind*. Since that time, it has been a rich site of musical exploration for multiple artists. Nearly 140 songs sample Simone's work, the majority being by hip-hop artists. As Salamisha Tillet has claimed, these artists use Simone's sound to "[mark] their virtuosity and political allegiances,"<sup>7</sup> since "sampling's aesthetic project is one of recombination and recontextualization."<sup>8</sup> With this understanding, it can be assumed that the combination of her vocals and instrumental arrangement provides its distinct qualities to the work of hip-hop artists, who also benefit from her cultural capital and reputation, whether they do so consciously or unconsciously. The qualities of Simone's work are understood in her role as a culture bearer, respected for her musical contributions and known through her sound, which is recontextualized with the work of newer artists for their benefit.

As other scholars have identified, sampling Simone's work, and that of other female vocalists and instrumentalists, is one way "women have influenced rap style and technique, ultimately shaping aesthetic standards and technological practices," although, they also assert, "pre-existing masculinist scripts and sexist practices" have "ensured the greater visibility of men's prerogatives and perspectives relative to women's."<sup>9</sup> The presence of sampled materials from the work of female vocalists and songwriters have not transformed the lyrical content, though they are recognized for their aesthetic merit. Simone's voice is not connected to her embodiment or presence, effectively creating temporal and technological distance. Instead, her voice represents her as what Vanessa Chang refers to as "sound-as-object," placing Simone in the realm of representing a time, a feeling, or something other than herself – a common understanding of recorded song where sound initiates and shapes the creative process.<sup>10</sup>

"Four Women" is inherently engendered with Black feminine rage, something I define within this work as Black women's justifiable response to suppression, rejection, and misogynoir as a form of postcolonial protest that is embodied and performed productively through creative mediums. Simone is singing this protest and playing it on the piano, a productive rage, a sounding of her embodied knowledge of oppression. Though rage is often understood as an extreme expression of anger or frustration, it can manifest with control, possessing the ability to reflect an amalgamation of diverse emotions expressed in manageable bursts. Moya Bailey articulates motivation for Black feminist rage by building on the work of Black feminist scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw by further acknowledging how feminist theory and antiracist discourse are often exclusionary as they intersectionally erase Black women through a theoretical

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<sup>6</sup> Neal, "Simone, Nina." Nadine Cohodas, *Princess Noire: The Tumultuous Reign of Nina Simone* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 63-70. Kernodle, "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free," 300.

<sup>7</sup> Salamishah Tillet, "Nina Simone and Her Hip-Hop Children," *American Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2014): 121, doi.org/10.1353/aq.2014.0006.

<sup>8</sup> Vanessa Chang, "Records that Play: The Present Past in Sampling Practice," *Popular Music* 28, no. 2 (2009): 146, doi.org/10.1017/S0261143009001755.

<sup>9</sup> Layli Phillips, Kerri Reddick-Morgan, and Dionne Patricia Stephens, "Oppositional Consciousness Within an Oppositional Realm: The Case of Feminism and Womanism in Rap and Hip-Hop, 1976-2004," *The Journal of African American History* 90, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 254, doi.org/10.1086/JAAHv90n3p253.

<sup>10</sup> Michail Exarchos, "Sample Magic: (Conjuring) Phonographic Ghosts and Meta-Illusions in Contemporary Hip-Hop Production," *Popular Music* 38, no. 1 (2019): 33, doi.org/10.1017/S0261143018000685. Chang, "Records that Play," 146. Chang, "Records that Play: The Present Past in Sampling Practice," 146.

and political focus on white women and Black men as the majority. She defines misogynoir as “the uniquely co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization.”<sup>11</sup> While her other songs (like “Young, Gifted, and Black” and “Revolution”) advocate for Black humanity, Simone celebrated Black female existence in “Four Women” through the articulation and resistance of four problematic archetypes that perpetuate misogynoir and limit ideas of Black female existence to their service of others.<sup>12</sup>

The first archetypal woman is “Aunt Sarah.” With her Black skin and strong back, she performs the identity of the self-sacrificing enslaved woman this identity calls to lineage. “Saffronia” has yellow skin, existing “between two worlds” because her rich white father raped her Black mother. “Sweet Thing,” the most sexually objectified female archetype, is a tan-skinned sex worker with inviting hips. Finally, “Peaches,” has brown skin and a confrontational attitude resulting from her parents’ enslavement.<sup>13</sup> The four women do not say what their name is, instead the song asks: “what do they call me?” They each reflect the gaze of others, the imposition of other’s beliefs and notions of value based on the different aspects that are described: this is true of slavery and beyond. Each woman responds “my name is” as a form of submission, accepting the roles into which they are cast and their subsequent societal functions.

The four women are distinguished by their four shades: black, yellow, tan, and brown. This is a spectrum of Black identity that alludes to Simone’s grand message of diversity and humanity in Black female identity and experience. Further, this reflects colorism, a hierarchy of perceived value based on skin color within one race of people. Aunt Sarah, Saffronia, Sweet Thing, and Peaches all carry titles imposed on them that denote worth based on the (predominantly white) male gaze – the patriarchal practice of female objectification and/or sexual valuation defined by male spectatorship.<sup>14</sup> This introduction, as Marcus Pyle has pointed out, merely alludes to the complexity of a song that symbolizes diasporic feminine subjugation, subconscious perpetuation of racial inequality, and the interplay of post-colonial introspective thought as and outside of Black female being – all aspects that are lost in its sampled contexts.<sup>15</sup> In the next section, I examine Jay-Z’s sampling of “Four Women” and argue that the significance of these realities is signaled in Simone’s presence and voice as representations of a cultural historian privy to the racial issues his song discusses: the elder is blessing his offering.

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<sup>11</sup> Moya Bailey, *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women’s Digital Resistance* (New York: NYU Press, 2021), 1. Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241-99.

<sup>12</sup> The song was inspired by the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in September 1963, which killed four young girls in Alabama. Due to this hate crime (committed by a white supremacist), the girls were posthumously awarded congressional gold medals. See Scott Wilson, “Congressional Gold Medal for ‘4 Little Girls’ Killed in ‘63 by KKK,” *The Seattle Times*, May 25, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> “Four Women,” MP3 audio, track 2 on Nina Simone, *Wild is the Wind*, UMG Recordings, 1966. To view a video of her performing the song, see Nina Simone, [“Nina Simone: Four Women.”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3vXf1vXp0k) Youtube.com, February 9, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Diane Ponterotto, “Resisting the Male Gaze: Feminist Responses to the ‘Normalization’ of the Female Body in Western Culture,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 17, no. 1 (2016), 147. This gaze is often guided by societal understandings of hegemonic (or dominant) masculine behaviors, which normalize it. For more on masculinities, see R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Marcus R. Pyle, “Nina Simone as Poet and Orchestrator,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 33, no. 2 (2021): 146, doi.org/10.1525/jpms.2021.33.2.130.

### *Calling on a Musical Foremother: Jay-Z is Big Mad*

In "The Story of O.J.," Jay-Z responds to a supposed quote from American former football player Orenthal "O.J." Simpson in which he discounted racial discourse to focus on his celebrity status and wealth as he faced convictions for the murder of his ex-wife and her friend: "I'm not black, I'm O.J."<sup>16</sup> Jay-Z, whose real name is Shawn Carter, connects dated stereotypes from slavery to current aspects of Black identity, showing that the titles have changed but Black skin is still understood as the most salient and relevant identity marker and cause for discrimination, something that unifies Black individuals in all positions of power or belonging, and determines their worth in America. The opening lyrics to the song immediately engage the listener, if not for the repeated use of the "n word," though how unapologetically he states this word with different qualifiers that are recognized as indicators of value or class.<sup>17</sup> Jay-Z presents identities in dichotomous relationships to demonstrate that despite their opposing natures their valuation is the same.

Simone's voice and music are heard throughout *The Story of O.J.*, increased roughly 25% in speed and livened up with a bass-heavy drum loop. The original key (a minor) is maintained as Jay-Z's song repeats Simone's initial notes on the piano and her first three word, "my skin is." At other points, the listener can hear "my skin is..." with the addition of a "yellow," slightly slowed down and pitched down. Her vocals bring their heaviness, their beleaguered weariness from the racialized existence of decades earlier to aid in furthering Jay-Z's message about Black progress through understanding our position in American society and the creation of generational wealth through financial education.

The song, and its accompanying animated video tackle issues of Black identity, socioeconomic class, and societal power dynamics to promote awareness of the perception of Black communities, from the inside and outside. The video is narrated by "Jaybo," an animated version of Jay-Z, who navigates different environments throughout time and space, focusing on racially charged imagery, like picking cotton in a field and a colored section on a public bus, reminiscent of segregation. Jay-Z's drive for financial stability (as described in the song) reflects his knowledge that his art and expression are forms of self-exposure, valuable products, and his work is the commodification of his existence: "I turned my life into a nice first week release date."<sup>18</sup> He is a brand, and with this awareness, decided to start his own clothing line, record label, and streaming service – commanding power in his industry and as an entrepreneurial figure in the Black community: he and his "niggas takin' real chances."

The lyrical content of Jay-Z's song is not focused on any overt messages about women, but the video imagines women in predictable roles in accordance with societal expectations. One heavy-set woman labors as the "mammy" figure. She has dark skin and is seen washing clothes; she is "Aunt Sarah." Another voluptuous female, wearing only a thong and pasties on her breasts with hair styled like a flapper from the 1920s, parades around a burlesque stage with a crowd of men ogling. This shapely woman confidently

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<sup>16</sup> Trent Fitzgerald, ["O.J. Simpson Says Jay-Z Misquoted Him with Lyric on 'The Story of O.J.'"](#) *XXL Magazine*, April 16, 2023.

<sup>17</sup> The song was initially released as a single but appeared on Jay-Z's 2017 album *4:44*, tackling issues of infidelity and loss – two contexts in which he acknowledges female perspectives. You can watch the music video and hear the song on YouTube. See Jay-Z, ["Jay-Z – 'The Story of O.J.'"](#) YouTube.com, July 5, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> "The Story of O.J.," MP3 audio, track 2 on Jay-Z, *4:44*, Roc Nation/UMG Recordings, 2017.

strutting across the stage to perform her sexuality for a crowd of screaming Black men is “Sweet Thing,” the precursor to the “hoe” figure often described or seen strutting nearly naked in other hip-hop videos.<sup>19</sup>

Simone does not fit neatly into her own proposed archetypes or those often presented in hip-hop visuals, because her art, her voice, and her cultural standing set her apart from the other women. In “The Story of O.J.” video, she is animated as a character playing the piano and singing, modes of performance she was known for during her career. She is depicted in an elevated role compared to other female figures, Jay-Z’s way of acknowledging her as a fellow creator and respected figure that challenged these stereotypical female roles. But Simone’s message of Black female diversity is not celebrated by depictions furthering limiting narratives seen in this video or in much of Jay-Z’s earlier work, including his song “99 Problems” (“and a bitch ain’t one”). Mahalia Little addresses how the use of terms like “bitch” and “hoe” in rap lyrics promotes toxic views of female identity, stating that it: “contributes to the monolithic labeling of Black women.” Further, this viewpoint suppresses our humanity and valuation for female sexuality, and “serves to further normalize patriarchal views of women as subhuman and inferior.”<sup>20</sup>

Simone’s voice is simultaneously celebrated as a beacon of Black personhood in a scene featuring the animated Simone singing and playing along with a band of Black performers while stripping its power to elevate female perspectives by visually perpetuating the same archetypal tropes Simone sought to reframe. It is clear that something is silenced in this portrayal. I argue that the way Jay-Z elevates Simone’s voice for his gain while subverting the power therein is similar to how American culture often adores and adapts Black signifiers and cultural products without recognizing the humanity of its producers. I digress... this is a global problem.

Miles White describes Jay-Z as offering intimate portraits of his experiences in his music, detailing his experiences growing up in Marcy Projects in Brooklyn, New York, and gaining street credibility “of having risked his body in performance” as “the outlaw” or “antiheroic figure and a powerful masculine actor who succeeded against the odds and lived to rap about it.”<sup>21</sup> His early work showed him celebrating his identity as a Black man raised by the streets who turned his past into a success story. “The Story of O.J.” embodies this success, with wisdom that reflects an awareness of the circumstances that changed and those that were beyond his control. Further, White states that Jay-Z “rhymes about the narrative arc of his own life... used as raw materials of aesthetic performance.”<sup>22</sup> Is it possible that in creating stories about his life for his own betterment and to fight the dehumanization of people like him, women were not equally considered? The archetype White describes is not limited to Jay-Z, as many hip-hop artists use similar lyrical tropes and forsake Black women in the process: misogynoir has a sound.<sup>23</sup> Carter serves his hip-hop masculinity directive in hypothetically possessing Nina’s voice without allowing it to be free. The two artists, the worlds in which they create and exist, and their musical messages share common ground but are ideologically disjointed.

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<sup>19</sup> Mahalia Ayana Little, “Why Don’t We Love These Hoes? Black Women, Popular Culture, and the Contemporary Hoe Archetype,” In *Black Female Sexualities*, eds. Trimiko Malancon and Joanne M. Braxton (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 90.

<sup>20</sup> Little, “Why Don’t We Love These Hoes?,” 90-91.

<sup>21</sup> Miles White, *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z: Race, Rap, and the Performance of Masculinity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 84.

<sup>22</sup> White, *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z*, 83.

<sup>23</sup> Little, “Why Don’t We Love These Hoes?,” 90-95.

### *Fisz Reminisces with Simone*

Hip-hop exists as a lingua franca of youth culture globally, but with a distinct awareness of cultural undercurrents, serving as a vehicle for furthering messages of counterculture.<sup>24</sup> For example, the performance of hip hop in Poland began following the end of communism in 1989, liberating exposure to Western popular culture throughout the nation, leading to the sale of African American hip-hop records in major cities like Krakow.<sup>25</sup> Throughout the 1990s, Renata Pasternak-Mazur observes, Polish hip-hop rose to prominence as a way for the "powerless and poor" to "resort to radical methods" to "articulate their interests" despite being "described as uncouth and ignorant of the new socio-economic reality."<sup>26</sup>

Two elements of hip-hop culture existed in Poland prior to the music: graffiti, as an aspect of resistance and protest since the 1980s, and DJs, who were popular in Poland's thriving disco scene of the late 1970s and 80s.<sup>27</sup> Breakdancing and emceeing came later, introduced by films portraying African American culture and popularized by Poland's "selective fascination of western trends" that is still elevated through the use of social media websites like YouTube and SoundCloud.<sup>28</sup> As Peter S. Green noted, since Poland is "virtually all-white," hip-hop lyrics "barely touch[ed] on familiar American themes of police violence or racism."<sup>29</sup> However, Lester Feder and Marcin Krasnowolski recognized that youth's performed their own version of supposed "blackness" by resisting idealized presentations of the world and their Polish culture.<sup>30</sup>

When Polish hip-hop became more culturally mainstreamed, it offered a voice to subaltern populations "but at the price of its distortion" and "the dilution of its message," proving a link between hip-hop and social exclusion, which Pasternak-Mazur notes is imposed by society rather than deriving from individual choice.<sup>31</sup> Ironically, Feder and Krasnowolski noticed that "wannabe hardcore" rappers (whose recordings possessed similar themes to those they heard in African American records, like "The Hard Life of a Street Rapper") were replaced with artists focused on nationalist sentiments and patriotic rhetoric, or

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<sup>24</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 2-5.

<sup>25</sup> Milosz Miszczyński and Przemysław Tomaszewski, "Wearing Nikes for a Reason: A Critical Analysis of Brand Usage in Polish Rap," in *Hip Hop at Europe's Edge: Music Agency, and Social Change*, eds. Milosz Miszczyński and Adriana Helbig (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 49. J. Lester Feder and Marcin Krasnowolski, "How Rap Became the Soundtrack to Polish Nationalism," *Buzzfeed News*, February 10, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Renata Pasternak-Mazur, "The Black Muse: Polish Hip-Hop as the Voice of 'New Others' in the Post-Socialist Transition," *Music & Politics* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2009), 18, doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0003.103.

<sup>27</sup> Pasternak-Mazur, "The Black Muse," 6.

<sup>28</sup> Pasternak-Mazur, "The Black Muse," 5. Julia Czub, "Polish Trap is a Thing and It Is Worth Your Time," *NME*, January 24, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Peter S. Green, "Poznan Journal: Polish Hip-Hop Rocks the Homies on the Blok," *The New York Times*, April 5, 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Feder and Krasnowolski, "How Rap Became the Soundtrack to Polish Nationalism."

<sup>31</sup> Pasternak-Mazur, "The Black Muse," 18.



those who used the style as a part of their varied creative interests.<sup>32</sup> The artist Fisz represents the latter type, using hip-hop as part of his musical experimentation among other genres. None of the approaches Polish rappers took were parody or uncredited appropriation: appreciation and adaptation are better descriptors.

Hip-hop's rise in relevance in Polish culture followed the popularity of punk rock in the 1980s, serving as a continuation of a rebellious aesthetic.<sup>33</sup> To this day, Polish people create and enjoy rap, whether they are releasing trap records online or watching a hip-hop music video their president made to raise money for coronavirus relief.<sup>34</sup> Conversely, numerous African American hip-hop artists have sampled Polish music, including the use of Polish jazz pioneer Michał Urbaniak's "Ekim" by A Tribe Called Quest in 1993.<sup>35</sup>

Fisz, whose real name is Bartosz Waglewski, regularly samples American music from different decades, including the 1960s and 1990s, aided by his producer brother, Emade. His piece/song "Heavi Metal" details Fisz's experiences in secondary school, describing moments of innocent excitement and embarrassment with a playful, childlike perspective.<sup>36</sup> Lyrical delivery comes in wandering, choppy fragments. Fisz is the narrator; in opposition with the intentions of other boys, he is seemingly unpopular, and observes the roles of his classmates and teachers as though he was separate from the environment. The first verse introduces a female interest that has matured and begun receiving attention from boys. Although not overtly stated, it seems like the narrator is fond of this girl. Some meaning may be lost in translation, like the meaning of "tauzen" or how popular the football club Górnik (Zabrze) was in the era the song describes. The nostalgic mood of the song is still salient, further understood in the second verse, which describes "a fog" of fragrance from the female interest before repeating the line: "God created her, Satan possessed her." This line is stated once in the first verse, twice in the second verse, and once again in the third verse. The line: "your dress was a huge scandal" also appears repeatedly, giving the impression that the narrator is thinking back on a meaningful memory of a female subject. Fisz describes a "flame" in his gut when "[he] felt [her] bra on [his] back" and describes this female's "dress and knee-highs" as famous.<sup>37</sup> It is clear that these moments are repeating in his mind. "Heavi Metal" is a song of forlorn prepubescent angst, poetically presented as a relatable offering about longing by his older self. More time has passed to process the experiences, but the fact that his desire for his female lyrical interest is incomplete still resonates in his jagged lyrical delivery and in the musical sound.

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<sup>32</sup> Feder and Krasnowolski, "How Rap Became the Soundtrack to Polish Nationalism." In Poland, hip-hop began as playful experimentation repeating themes encountered in African American hip-hop but has developed to a recognizable style linked to Polish nationalism, specifically supporting or challenging the far-right Law and Justice Party that rose to prominence after winning the 2015 elections. In Polish, the song "The Hard Life of a Street Rapper" is "Niełatwy Żywy Ulicznego Rapera." See "Niełatwy Żywy Ulicznego Rapera," MP3 audio, track 11 on Bosski Roman, KRAK3, Drużyna Mistrzów, 2010.

<sup>33</sup> Feder and Krasnowolski, "How Rap Became the Soundtrack to Polish Nationalism."

<sup>34</sup> Julia Czub, "Polish Trap is a Thing and It Is Worth Your Time." Trap is an edgier sounding, more recent subgenre of hip-hop. "Poland's President Joins Hip-Hop Challenge to Help Medics," *Associated Press*, May 12, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Matt Harmon, "Polish Music in American Hip-Hop: 9 Unexpected Samples," *Culture.PL*, June 6, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> You can view the music video (and hear the song) on YouTube. See Papaya Films, "[FIZS – 'Heavi Metal'.](#)" Youtube.com, March 4, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> "Heavi Metal," MP3 audio, track 5 on Fisz & Emade, *Heavi Metal*, Asphalt Records, 2008.



Simone's voice and sound remind Fisz of this time, a time he is trying to express musically. Her own protest subverted, Fisz makes use of her deep timbre, singing "my" (the first word of "Four Women") on repeat. In the original context, Simone's voice would have continued to say, "my skin is black." Fisz, however, follows Simone's "my" with "lonely heart" from The Electric Prune's "Holy You Are."<sup>38</sup> This interesting repetition of "my lonely heart" in English cleverly alludes to the meaning of the words being rapped in Polish about a one-sided attraction. This juxtaposition lets the listener know that Fisz has a command of both languages for his creative intents. The reflective position Fisz takes removes him from the dominant idiom of hip-hop masculinity, detailing the development of masculine identity in Poland – something that may present similar markers to hegemonic masculinity in America. His character in the song wants female attention and observes male competition through an athletic challenge, as well as other boys bidding for the attention of his female interest. These are common traits of masculine behavior, but the overarching feeling of uncertainty and wavering confidence reveals an incomplete understanding of motivations for the behaviors he describes.<sup>39</sup> Fisz presents the events with the wisdom of his adult self but embodies the mentality of his younger self to develop the narrative with relatability.

Simone's voice is not elevated in this application, but it is not disrespected. As other scholars point out, considering the distinct context in which the song was created and existed in the United States starkly contrasts with the legacy of Poland.<sup>40</sup> I argue that sampling Simone's voice in this song is neutral in relation to messages of her life and legacy. Removed from intentions of furthering any musical or embodied agenda, Simone's voice simply *is*: present in this context along with her musical material that sets the nostalgic tone Fisz desired. Her repeating piano ostinato from the beginning of the song and brief flourish as it repeated – the same portions sampled by Jay-Z – are slightly sped up and made more jubilant with the additional melodic riffs on a solo flute repeating throughout the duration of the track. Her identity, as presented by her voice, is not the focus in this song, with additional musical material added to make the track sound jazzier and bouncier. Her voice is still foregrounded, but as a musical detail more than a sounding body.

### *The Spatial, The Temporal, The Sonic*

In looking at the adaptation of hip-hop in a Korean context, Hae-Kyung Um recognizes hip-hop as "a postmodern music for which the creative process is to 'cut and mix' different musical styles and cultural references, allowing for a continuous process of hybridization and syncretism."<sup>41</sup> She argues that in the process of "cultural reterritorialization," hip hop lends itself to blending with other styles, but in the blending, relevant aspects of borrowed sonic material can lose meaning, transformed but not transfigured. Similarly, Jayna Brown acknowledges the limiting use of Black women's voices, which are often celebrated for their emotive capacity and strength, furthering tropes of the strong Black woman without humanizing

<sup>38</sup> "Holy You Are," MP3 audio, track 2 on The Electric Prunes, *Release of an Oath*, Reprise Records, 1968.

<sup>39</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 31.

<sup>40</sup> Lucy Mayblin, Aneta Piekut, and Gill Valentine, "'Other' Posts in 'Other' Places: Poland through a Postcolonial Lens," *Sociology* 50, no. 1 (2016): 60-76, doi.org/10.1177/00380385145567. Poland has not colonized other territories, though it has been colonized by other European powers, including the Russian Empire and the Austrian Monarchy.

<sup>41</sup> Hae-Kyung Um, "The Poetics of Resistance," 52.

the subjects themselves.<sup>42</sup> In the case of Jay-Z and Fitz, there is an aspect of Simone's being, her grain, that is silenced, quenched, muted, and effectively forgotten despite her sounding.

If we think of sampling as a performance and the sampled artist entertaining those who use the sample in a subsequent creation, Jay-Z and Fisz are members of an audience to Simone's "Four Women." They are engaged in the act of musicking, they are telling themselves stories about themselves using Simone as a nexus for sonic direction, and they have been changed by experiencing and exploring Simone's work together.<sup>43</sup> Both Fisz and Jay-Z heard Simone's song, had different experiences, and processed its musical material in different ways based on their mode of, and capacity for, artistic expression. It can be suspected that both artists recognized the inherent value of Simone's recorded performance and connected with her voice and musical ideas substantially enough to associate themselves with her.

Music-making is a performance of culture reflecting social performance as a communication system that is refined through perpetual, transgenerational interactions.<sup>44</sup> This realization shifts the focus from the producers to their relationships with listeners: who is the intended audience and what is the artist trying to say to them? Although listening to music is often a solitary act, we consume musical products with interactions from others and our own musical opinions and preferences are shaped by those around us: locally and globally. While I argue for an understanding of Simone's voice and intentions, it is not a requirement that songs that sample her music function with this purpose, nor could they attempt to. Instead, the sound of her music or voice becomes its own musical material to form new moments of meaning within the context of another artist's vision. Other artists now possess agency over samples of Simone's work to affect how they are received. Through such sampled reuses, her song, the meaning it carries, and how it is received, has changed over time, placed in new cultural, racial, and gendered contexts that do not aim to serve her initial protest, though it lives on beyond her presence, telling new stories.

## About the author

Abigail Lindo is a music researcher, creative, and PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of Florida. She is a Fulbright alumna, PEO Scholar, and SEC Emerging Scholar who has presented nationally and internationally on Afrodiasporic music practices, Azorean sonic expression, ecomusicology, feminist futures, and community musicking. Lindo's dissertation is focused on music festivals, sustainability in musical ecotourism, and the lived realities of women and queer people in redefining modern Portuguese sonic identity in the autonomous region of the Azores. Lindo is a former K-12 music educator and classically trained mezzo-soprano vocalist who enjoys writing songs in her downtime.

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<sup>42</sup> Jayna Brown, "Black Sonic Refusal," in *The Female Voice in the Twentieth Century: Material, Symbolic, and Aesthetic Dimensions*, eds. Serena Facci and Michela Garda (London: Routledge, 2021), 103.

<sup>43</sup> Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 140, doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2014.0096.

<sup>44</sup> Sandra E. Trehub, Judith Becker, and Iain Morley, "Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Music and Musicality," *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 370, no. 1664 (March 19, 2015): 1.

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